

Kingsford-Smith

I: Albert Park, 1928

He'd shaved a thermal lather off Hawaii
When they got wind of his mad intention
And felled trees, teak, kauri, the great ivi
Under which Degei pondered his creation,
Coiled in the lacework shade, a fossil of
Himself, bats fruiting in the boughs above.
The knolls were graded, apertures filled in,
Telegraph poles lowered for the approach.
Then they waited, planter, taukei and kin,
Twelve coolies, the Governor in his coach.
Around noon a nymph jabbed her parasol
At the sky and down she came like a swift,
Shearing a few trees, blowing up a squall
That stank of brine and carbon, and of myth.

II: Icarus

At the royal ball, dog-tired, goggle-eyed,
He ignored nymphs mooching about his wick
Like stricken moths, but nursed a gin and tried
Not to smile when they toasted his epic
Voyage in accents clipped and sedentary.
Later, he slipped out into the moonlight,
While a Planter's wife murdered Tchaikovsky
On a church organ, and pondered the height
Icarus reached before he got waxed. Then
It struck him that all follies were classical,
Though one were both Smith and Antipodean,
Though one always verged on the cynical.
Next day a maid counting plumes on his bed
Saw him in the sunlight, half-man, half-bird.